
The first day

By C. Van Dam

"And God said"

"And God said." Repeatedly throughout Genesis 1 we read those words, "God said," followed by an act of creation. God speaks and it is there. God creates by speaking. What does this mean? In seeking an answer, we must be governed by what Scripture tells us. Several passages come to mind.

One can think of Psalm 33:8 and 9. "By the word of the LORD, the heavens were made and all their host by the breath of His mouth. . . . He spoke and it came to be; He commanded and it stood forth" (compare also Psalm 148:5b, ". . . He commanded and they [i.e. His created works] were created"). God created by His word.

What was involved with the creation by the Word is made more clear as we go to the New Testament. As the reader of Scripture knows, "the Word" is a name for the Son who was involved in the work of creation! "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:1-3, 14; cf. 1 John 1:1-3; 5:1; Revelation 19:13). The reference to the Word in creating is further also illuminated by 1 Corinthians 8:8, "Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist." One can also think of Colossians 1:18 and 17, "For in Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities – all things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (cf. Revelation 3:14).

If we read the words "and God said" in Genesis 1, in the light of Scripture, then what is not immediately obvious in Genesis 1, becomes more clear elsewhere. God's creating by the word involved the Son. The word that God spoke was not without content. It was a powerful and living word. The word by which He called into being things from nothing was powerful for it was spoken in and through the Son.¹ Our confession can summarize the biblical truth on this point according to the testimony of the Scriptures (cf. above) as follows, "We believe that the Father through the Word, that is, through His Son, has created out of nothing heaven and earth and all creatures" (Belgic Confession, Article 12).

"'Let there be light' and there was light"

After God's creation of heaven and earth, His first work of creation was light. Light as we know it is part of creation. It was made. God spoke and it was there.

The importance of light is evident, not only from its place

in God's work of creation, but also from our own experience. Who can imagine the possibility of life without light?

It is significant that light was created independently of the sun, moon, and stars which were created on the fourth day. Although we will be coming back to this in a future article, suffice it for now to note that "There was a time when men said that this was a scientific error, but men do not speak like that anymore.² Rather than ridicule this order, we should carefully consider the implications of this sequence of God's first creating light and later the sun, moon and stars. This order of God's creation work shows that light comes from God. He made it. Light does not come in the first instance from the sun. Light is a gift of God, not of the sun! What a tremendous gospel this is for our naturalistic age in which people speak of the sun as if it alone makes life possible. For this reason people can even fret about the future horror of a spent sun. For Israel this order of God's creating activity was also of great comfort overagainst the pagan religions which worshipped the sun. Not the sun, which is a part of creation, but the Creator who alone gives light is to be adored.

"And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness" (Genesis 1:4). God's work was pleasing in His eyes. It was as He wanted it to be so that the light could serve the purpose for which it was made. Notice that the phrase "God saw that . . . (it) was good" was not used with verse 2 where we read: "The earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep." God's creation was not yet as He wanted it. The earth was not yet suitable for the purpose for which God had called it into being.

The fact that the created light was pleasing to God does not mean an end to darkness. No. God makes a separation between light and darkness. Each gets its place. God had made both (cf. Psalm 104:20; Isaiah 45:7). Both are needed. Think, for instance, of how darkness helps in sleeping! What the place of light and darkness is, is clear from verse 5.

"God called the light Day and the darkness He called Night" (Genesis 1:5a). It appears from this verse that the light which God had made functioned in a way similar to the sun; that is, it was not always to be daytime. Also nighttime was to have its regular place. It has been suggested that this could point to a light source outside and beyond the world with the earth rotating. In any case, the fact that God assigned names to the periods of light and darkness is significant. This shows God's power and sovereignty. Think of Psalm 74:18a, "Thine is the day; Thine also the night." God made the separation between light and darkness and God gave each their name.

"And there was evening and there was morning, the first day" (Genesis 1:5b); that is nighttime and daytime making one day. From Exodus 20:11 we know that God created heaven and earth in six days. We may therefore assume that the first day began in darkness with God's work of creation in

the beginning (vv. 1, 2). This darkness was followed by the creation of light. The first day ended with the coming of evening, which was counted with the following day (Genesis 1:8; similarly with the other days, cf. vv. 13, 18, 23, 31). In view of the way the first day was made, it is understandable that the Bible reckons a day from evening to evening (e.g., Leviticus 23:32; Psalm 55:17; Luke 23:54).³

What did day one and the other days of the week of creation consist of? What constituted a so-called "creation day"? The Lord willing, more on that next time.

¹ Cf. further on this, H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, II (1967; this edition first published in 1907), pp. 385-389.

² E.J. Young, *In the Beginning* (1976), p. 40.

³ Our custom of starting the day at midnight derives from the Romans. G.F. Hasel, "Day," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* I (Revised Edition, 1979), p. 877.

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True ecumenicity²

Church history and ecumenicity

By K. Deddens

"Let the church be one"

Not only in the Scriptures and in the confessions of the church is true ecumenicity apparent, but it is also stressed in the course of the history of the church.

In the *Didachè* or "The teaching of the Lord through the twelve apostles to the gentiles," a very old document already known to the church fathers and at least going back to the second century, this prayer is found in connection with the Lord's Supper: "As this piece (of bread) was scattered over the hills and then was brought together and made one, so let your Church be brought together from the ends of the earth into your Kingdom. For yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever."⁶

We have a rhymed version of this part of the *Didachè* in our *Book of Praise*, namely, in Hymn 46:

"As grain, once scattered on the hillsides,
Was in the broken bread made one,
So from all lands Thy Church be gathered
Into Thy kingdom by Thy Son."⁷

Reformation times

From the very beginning the Reformers of the 16th century emphasized the unity of the church. Already in 1518 Luther spoke in favour of a general council of the church, with the one principle that the Holy Scriptures would be the decisive norm. He asked for such a "free, general, Christian council." By "free" he meant independent of papal control, and by "Christian" he understood that judgments were to be based on the principle of the Scriptures alone and that laymen were to be enfran-

chised. In 1520, after the ban of the pope, he renewed his appeal for a general council. But when finally a general council was held, starting in 1545 at Trent, it was only a papal council....

Also Calvin was in favour of a gener-

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al council, but he strongly stressed the difference between true and false councils. The condition for a true general council is that Christ would be presiding it:

Now it is Christ's right to preside over all councils and to have no man share His dignity. But I say that He presides only when the whole assembly is governed by His Word and Spirit.⁸

In the following paragraph Calvin continues:

Christ will be in the midst of a council only if it is gathered together in His name. As a consequence, it will benefit our adversaries but little to mention councils of bishops a thousand times over; nor will they persuade us to believe what they con-

tend — that councils are governed by the Holy Spirit — before they convince us that these have been gathered in Christ's name. Ungodly and evil bishops can just as much conspire against Christ as good and honest ones can come together in His name. We have clear proof of this fact in a great many decrees that have come forth from such councils....

I now reply with but one word: Christ promises nothing except to those who are gathered in His name. Let us therefore define what that means. I deny that they are gathered in His name who, casting aside God's commandment that forbids anything to be added or taken away from His Word (Deut. 4:2; cf. Deut. 12:32; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18-19), ordain anything according to their own decision; who, not content with the oracles of Scripture, that is, the sole rule of perfect wisdom, concoct some novelty out of their own heads. Surely, since Christ promised that He would be present not in all councils whatsoever but laid down a special mark by which a true and lawful one might be distinguished from the rest, it behooves us never to neglect this distinction. This is the covenant which God of old made with the Levitical priests, that they should teach from His own lips (Mal. 2:7). He required this always of the prophets; we see that this rule was also imposed upon the apostles. Those who violate this covenant God deems worthy neither of the honor of the priesthood nor of any authority.⁹

Calvin strived for the unity of the church